

News Release



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Sussex paramedic part of federal response team along Gulf Coast

GEORGETOWN, Del. – As the Gulf Coast struggles to reclaim its way of life in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Americans are lending their hands and their hearts from all corners of the country. That outpouring of assistance includes at least one set of helping hands from Sussex County, Del.

Paramedic Tedd Winneberger, 38, a 12-year veteran of Sussex County Emergency Medical Services, has been deployed to Selma, Ala., as part of a disaster management team for the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The Millsboro resident is there to manage the distribution of medical supplies to Disaster Medical Assistance Teams, FEMA units that are made up of doctors, nurses and other first-responders who are deployed to disaster areas to administer medical aid.

Winneberger arrived in Selma on Thursday, just days after Hurricane Katrina raged ashore. Since the storm lay waste to scores of towns and cities along the Gulf Coast, Winneberger has been charged with distributing everything from syringes to life packs to the hardest hit parts of Mississippi and Alabama.

Where Winneberger is, in central Alabama, the damage he has seen has been fairly minimal. But he said there is a feeling of helplessness, despair and sadness throughout the region.

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“Almost solemn and depressing,” he said. “Some of the stuff you’re seeing on the news just barely scrapes the surface of what’s going on.”

Winneberger, who has responded to other disasters for FEMA since 2002, is part of a National Disaster Medical System management team, which supports the more than two dozen federal DMATs. Those teams are set up throughout the country to provide rapid emergency medical care in disasters.

Each one usually comprises about three dozen members, and, like a military unit, is intended to be mobile and self-sufficient for an extended period.

While Winneberger’s role is as a federal agent – not as a county paramedic – his service is nonetheless a reflection of the neighbor-helping-neighbor spirit found in Sussex County and throughout Delaware.

“It’s a source of pride for us. It tells you about the quality of people working here for us,” said Glenn Luedtke, director of Sussex County EMS. “We’re happy to support him in this.”

And it could support Sussex County someday, County Administrator Robert L. Stickels said. “The experience Winneberger is receiving could benefit Sussex County if ever the day comes when a large-scale disaster taxes the medical system here.”

Winneberger’s departure has meant some minor adjustments to the county’s paramedic schedule, Luedtke said. Other staffers have been moved into the slots for which Winneberger was scheduled to work. Winneberger is on leave from the county while serving on the federal team.

Winneberger said he could be away from home and family for at least two weeks, if not longer. But the sacrifice is vital for so many right now.

“Sure, I would certainly rather be home,” he said. “But there’s an extreme need for personnel right now. So I’ve put my personal feelings and needs aside, and I’m doing what’s needed.”

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